"The neglected, the unutterable Verlaine": Arthur Symons, the *Saturday Review* and French Literature in the 1890s

In October 1894 London County Council revoked the Empire music hall's alcohol license and forced it to close the "promenade" area of the theatre. It took this step in response to a campaign by the National Vigilance Association, led by Laura Ormiston Chant, who was outraged by the performance of erotic *tableaux vivantes* on the stage and the activities of prostitutes off-stage. Early in November, coverage of this decision took an unorthodox turn in the pages of the *Saturday Review*. Up to that point, contributors had been critical of the purity campaigners, whilst maintaining a prurient fascination with the measures taken by Chant and her supporters to secure evidence of prostitution at the Empire: "These good ladies appear to have gone to see 'improprieties,' and to have seen them to their heart's content."[1] The council's decision was criticized as "absurd and tyrannous,"[2] but contributors strove to retain the moral high ground, even denouncing the very nature of the council's proceedings as "indecent."[3]

In contrast, the leading article of 10 November 1894 suggested that Chant's "commendable desire to extirpate immorality is not reinforced by the knowledge of the conditions of the problem." These, the article explained, lay in deeper causes:

> Nature, being no Puritan, has arranged matters so that there is a much larger proportion of women in the world than of men, and that in the normal man and woman there are certain instincts which demand satisfaction, and which, if merely restrained and fettered by law, are certain by some means or other to find that satisfaction.[4]

Some defenders of the Empire denied that it occurred, but this leader urges prostitution as a solution to "instincts" left unsatisfied by the demographic distribution of the sexes. Such a frank affirmation of sexuality was a new turn.

This marked change in tone and view may be attributed to the fact that the unnamed author of "The Case of the Empire" was Arthur Symons. As a poet and critic, Symons work has become synonymous with Decadence, with its reputation for transgressive

aesthetics and sexual attitudes. His name is prominent amongst critical accounts of the writers who:

> introduced Decadence to the British public in critical essays, though many of these were limited to periodicals aimed at an exclusive audience of social progressives, intellectuals and the literary avant-garde. These essays tended to describe Decadence as a distinctly French phenomenon and sought to provide a precise definition for an audience unfamiliar with its tenets.[5]

Published in 1893, Symons's essay "The Decadent Movement in Literature" epitomises the works described here by Kirsten MacLeod, with its focus on French writers, such as J.K. Huysmans, Paul Verlaine, and Stephane Mallarmé and its paradoxical praise for Decadence as "a new and beautiful and interesting disease."[6] The subsequent publication of his poem, "Stella Maris" within the first issue of the *Yellow Book* during June 1894 confirmed Symons's role as an exponent and practitioner of Decadence, since it contains frank reference to his experiences with prostitutes. However, whilst this might account for the liberal attitude towards prostitution expressed in "The Case of the Empire," it doesn't explain how those views found an outlet within the *Saturday Review*, which does not have a reputation for Decadence.

The answer lies within an important development in the history of the *Saturday Review* that has received relatively little attention from scholars. For Symons's career there began early in November 1894 only after the British-born American journalist, Frank Harris, purchased the magazine.[7] Although Symons continued contributing to the *Saturday Review* until well after Harris's departure (Figure 1.), there is a strong association between Symons's links with this publication and Harris's values and ethos as an editor. Harris' employment of Symons amongst the new staff of writers on the *Review*, I shall argue, both confirms and complicates MacLeod's account of a "British Decadence", one "conditioned by literary, social and cultural forces" specific to a British context.[8] In addition to public statements of affirmation, such as "The Decadent Movement in Literature," Symons's exposition of avant-garde literary values also took place within his reviewing and other journalistic activities, and Harris provided an important outlet. Whilst recent French literature featured strongly here, the takeover of

the *Saturday Review* provides one example of how much this activity was endemic to the history of British periodicals.

Symons's career confirms MacLeod's general observation that the critical apologia for Decadence tended to take place in "exclusive" publications: his involvement with the *Yellow Book* exemplifies this, as does Symons's subsequent role as editor of the short-lived avant-garde periodical, the *Savoy,* during 1896. But his involvement in a weekly periodical with a broader audience, such as the *Saturday Review* under Harris, also needs to take its place amongst MacLeod's account of local historical and cultural tensions within professional writing circles during the 1890s.[9]

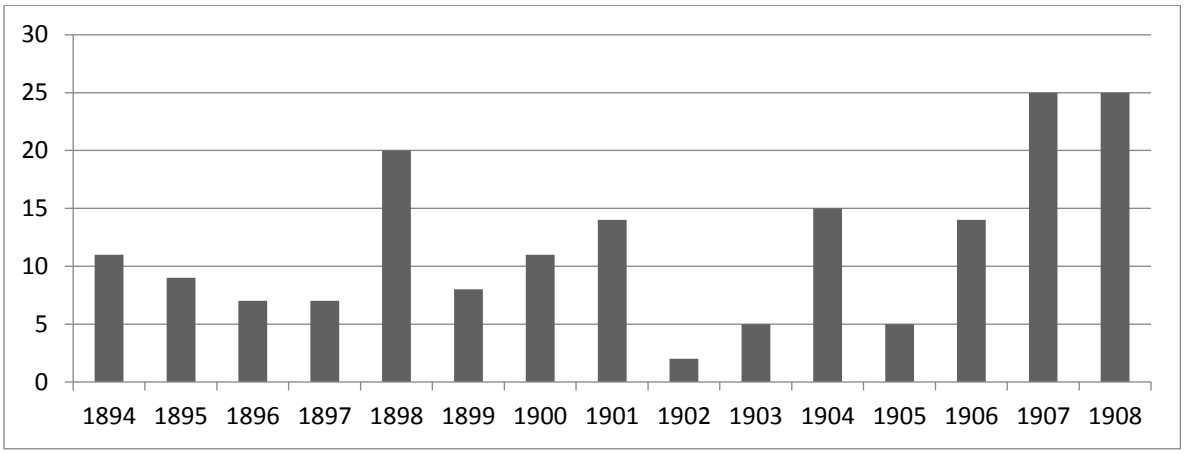

Figure 1. Arthur Symons's Contributions to the *Saturday Review*

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Established by A.J.B. Beresford Hope in 1855 and edited by J.D. Cook, the *Saturday Review* achieved a weekly circulation of over 10,000 readers during its heyday in the 1860s.[10] After Cook's death in 1868, Philip Harwood became editor and then Walter Herries Pollock in 1883. There is a consensus, however, that the quality of the paper declined during this period. Anecdotally, Frank Harris claimed that the circulation of the *Saturday Review* had suffered to such an extent that the price of £5600, which he agreed for the paper with the owner, Lewis Edmunds QC, in November 1894, represented a pound for every reader.[11]

The *Saturday Review* had always been conservative in cultural matters. Reviewing *Poems and Ballads* in 1866, for example, it had famously denounced A.C. Swinburne as "the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs," laying into him over three pages for "grovelling down amongst the nameless shameless abominations which inspire him with such frensied delight."[12] And it acquired an increasing reputation for its harsh style of reviewing, as Harris noted:

> *The Saturday Review* was evilly notorious as the most poisonous critic of all lost and all new causes. I told my contributors from the beginning that I wanted the *Saturday Review* to become known as the finder of Stars, and not the finder of faults.[13]

Harris didn't simply hope to renew the paper's financial fortunes: he sought to change its literary ethos.

He did this by assembling a fresh team of talented contributors, including George Bernard Shaw as theatre reviewer, D.S. MacColl as art editor, H.G. Wells as a reviewer of fiction, and, of course, Arthur Symons, who reviewed mostly poetry and European literature. Looking back, Wells recalled that this change of personnel involved direct confrontation:

> [Harris] had summoned most of the former staff to his presence in order to read out scraps from their recent contributions to them and to demand, in the presence of his "Dear Gahd" and his faithful henchman Silk, why the hell they wrote like that. It was a Revolution,— the twilight of the Academic. But Professor Saintsbury, chief of that anonymous staff, had been warned in time by Edmund Gosse and so escaped the crowning humiliation.[14]

On this account, Harris's "Revolution" was a conscious attempt to remove conservative political and literary writers from the *Saturday Review*, prompting an exodus of: "Clergymen, Oxford dons, respectable but strictly anonymous men of learning."[15]

Harris did not openly discuss his takeover of the paper within the pages of the *Saturday Review.* This may be one reason why its implications have yet to be explored in much detail. But he did write about this change of personnel in retrospect. In places these recollections seem less trustworthy than Wells's account: one memoir, for example, suggests that Harris had merely sought "the ablest men […] careless what their opinions might be."[16] Elsewhere, however, Harris's choice of example to illustrate the new, positive direction he wished for "evilly notorious" *Saturday* is telling. Upon receiving a hostile review of Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly,* from the brother of Sidney Low (journalist and editor of the *St James Gazette*), Harris commissioned Wells to write an alternative. In Harris's memory, the replacement was lengthy in its enthusiasm; he recalls Wells exclaiming: "I have written pages about Conrad, not columns, and I have praised him to the skies. Will you stand it?"[17] In fact, the published review incorporated its praise ("a very powerful story indeed, with effects that will certainly capture the imagination and haunt the memory of the reader") into a single column of half a page along with reviews of two other "'local colour' stories," novels by George Ranken and John Mackie.[18] Although he disavows the significance of this anecdote ("one instance will do as well as fifty"), Harris seeks credit after the fact in his memoir, for helping to launch Conrad's literary reputation. Assuming that there is some degree of truth to his anecdote, it relates to a period when, as Peter McDonald has pointed out, Conrad was struggling to achieve acceptance for his work.[19] It is telling, then, that Harris should cite the treatment of Conrad's work as representative of his editorial influence. He did not simply soften literary reviewing within the periodical; there are signs that he did so in a manner to champion "difficult" and unpopular writers such as Conrad in defiance of the outgoing old guard of "dons" and "clergymen".

Elsewhere, Harris contradicts any declarations of neutrality regarding his contributors' "opinions," in his description of the mischievous delight he took in employing Shaw:

> The idea of connecting Shaw the Socialist orator with the High Tory *Saturday Review* pleased me: the very incongruity tempted and his ability was beyond question.[20]

This predilection for controversy and iconoclasm informed Harris's choice of other contributors, too. In his memoirs, Harris observes of McColl, that he was "one of the first in England, I think, to understand Cézanne as well as Monet and Manet."[21] But in the year before Harris's takeover of the *Saturday Review*, MacColl had become embroiled in a dispute with J.A. Spender over the work of Edgar Degas. As Kate Flint points out, taking issue in the *Spectator* with Spender's distaste for works such as Degas' *L'Absinthe* aligned McColl with R.A.M. Stevenson and the New Art Criticism. His opposition to Spender placed McColl amidst "progressive" exponents of contemporary art who placed aesthetic values above moral concerns about subject matter.[22] His choice of new contributors, then, reflects not only Harris's own tastes, but also a desire to reshape the *Saturday Review* in opposition to conservative cultural forces.

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Although it is nowhere mentioned in his memoirs of this period, Harris's deployment of Arthur Symons amongst his new team of writers and critics clearly belongs in this context too. The two men first met during Harris' period as editor of the *Fortnightly Review,* a post he assumed in July 1886 after leaving the *Evening News*. Symons would later describe Harris as an "intimate" friend during the 1890s;[23] likewise, after the First World War, Harris would recall Symons's "mastery of prose."[24] Their acquaintance, however, dates from Symons's adaptation (with the help of George Moore) of Harris's short story "A Modern Idyll" for the stage during 1891. The story, which appeared in the *Fortnightly* during June 1891, concerns the development of an adulterous relationship between an American Baptist minister and one of his married, female deacons. Symons's biographer, Karl Beckson suggests that his adaptation, *The Minister's Call,* which was performed by the Independent Theatre on 4 March 1892, was probably motivated by the sensational value of its subject matter rather than any real affinity for Harris. This transgressive material provides, nevertheless, a suggestive start to an acquaintance that would prove significant to Symons's journalistic career.

As *The Minister's Call* opened on stage, the *Fortnightly Review* published the first of three articles by Symons that appeared during 1892: his profile of the French writer J.K. Huysmans, followed in May by an article on the Spanish music-hall and in August by

Symons's review of W.E. Henley's *The Song of the Sword* (later re-titled *London Voluntaries*). On the back of their connection through London literary and theatrical circles, Harris offered Symons an important opportunity to develop his public standing, through his role as editor at the *Fortnightly*. All three of these pieces would prove important to the development of Symons's critical thought and to his burgeoning reputation as a poet and critic associated with Decadence.

Space at the *Fortnightly* granted by Harris came at an important juncture for Symons. His reputation as an authority on the music hall, for example, only really dates from earlier that year: Symons started contributing weekly articles on popular theatre to the *Star* in February 1892. His description of visiting the Alcazar Español in Barcelona for the *Fortnightly* begins with a specific statement of affiliation that mixes his general interests with the language of his chosen topic: "I am *aficionado*, as a Spaniard would say, of music-halls." The article then sets out his personal and aesthetic interests explicitly:

> I come to the music-hall for dancing, for singing, for the human harmonies of the acrobat. And I come for that exquisite sense of the frivolous, that air of Bohemian freedom, that relief from respectability, which one gets here, and nowhere more surely than here.[25]

The mixture of personal testimony and aesthetic judgment with an implicit rejection of conservative values and hierarchies sounds a note here that became characteristic of this phase of Symons's career. Indeed, the personal associations developed in such public pronouncements reached a pitch three years later when Symons announced "My life is like a music hall" in the prologue to his collection of poems, *London Nights*.

Although Symons's second article for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1892 on J.K. Huysmans was probably occasioned by the publication of *Là-bas* in France the previous year, it offers a more general account of the French writer, identifying *À rebours* as the highest achievement of his phase as a Decadent writer. As G.A. Cevasco points out, Symons was not the first writer to discuss Huysmans in a British periodical: George Moore reviewed *À rebours* for the *St James Gazette* shortly after its first publication in 1884.[26] But

Symons's verdict in this particular article has been influential. In relation to his own body of work, Symons incorporated material from it into the endnotes for the first edition of his collection of essays on nineteenth-century French literature, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). Subsequent editions moved it to a more prominent position within the book.[27] The influence of this collection upon subsequent critics has been such that, republished in *The Symbolist Movement,* Symons's summary allusion to *À rebours* in this *Fortnightly* article as "a sort of breviary" for the worshippers of Decadence has become widely cited in both accounts of Huysmans and the Decadent movement in general.[28]

Perhaps surprisingly, Symons's essay on Henley, his final contribution to the *Fortnightly Review* during 1892, is important in this respect too. Henley is more frequently associated with conservative British responses opposed to the foreign influence of Decadent writers. It was under Henley's editorship of the *Scots Observer*, for example, that Charles Whibley published an anonymous scathing dismissal of Wilde's *Dorian Gray* as suited only for "outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys."[29] Indeed, Henley himself was widely believed to have penned the review. So it must have seemed paradoxical to many readers when Symons included him (along with Walter Pater) as one of only two English writers discussed in "The Decadent Movement in Literature" in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* during June 1893. As noted by MacLeod, this essay, with its strong emphasis upon French writers, became widely influential as a key statement of Decadent aesthetics for English-speaking readers. But the inclusion of Henley draws directly upon Symons's previous article in the *Fortnightly,* which addresses Henley as "revolutionary" and identifies his poetry as the epitome of what it is "to be modern in poetry."[30] Symons likens Henley's writings to the music of Wagner and the visual arts of Whistler, Degas and Rodin, comparing Henley with Verlaine. The *Fortnightly* article thus rehearses the unorthodox claims that Symons would work up into a clearer position within "The Decadent Movement."[31]

As editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, then, Harris gave Symons significant space to develop his ideas and his public persona as a critic and exponent of "modern" literature and Decadence. This was, however, not a new role for Harris. Laurel Brake describes how Harris was also instrumental in publishing work by Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde

that other editors might have considered risqué or transgressive during his period at the *Fortnightly*. Brake points out that Wilde first published "The Truth of Masks" and "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" under Harris's editorship, suggesting that he was open to "Wilde's libertine, provocative and light-hearted defence of the aesthetic perfection of the life of a murderer and forger."[32] And Wilde's famous preface to *Dorian Gray* also first appeared in the *Fortnightly* in the scandalous aftermath to his novel's appearance in *Lippincott's New Monthly* during March 1891.

In his editorial capacity, Harris seems to have offered similar patronage to Symons as he did for Pater and Wilde, providing a format and an outlet sympathetic to topics, views and methodologies that it may have been hard to place in other publications. In this context, however, it may not be easy to distinguish between Harris's influence upon Symons's developing affiliation with Decadence and Symons's contribution to the "libertine" reputation of the *Fortnightly* under Harris. In either case, Harris and Symons seem to have carried over their roles into the *Saturday Review* from the very earliest period of Harris's editorship.

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Just as Harris later boasted of championing Conrad, so the subject matter and content of Symons's contributions indicate that, as editor of the *Saturday Review*, Harris inculcated transgressive cultural values associated with Decadence and Symbolism. As well as his attack on London County Council, Laura Ormiston Chant and the National Vigilance Association, Symons also contributed a review of Paul Verlaine's *Epigrammes* to the first issue edited by Harris, on 10 November 1894. Although both these items appeared anonymously, the publication of two items in one issue was relatively unusual for Symons, who more often contributed only one article or review at a time. In retrospect, the extent of his involvement with the first issue edited by Harris seems curiously high.

Symons's review of *Epigrammes* also marks a departure within the critical values of the periodical which is comparable to the shift of tone and attitude in his frank espousal of human "instincts" against the National Vigilance Association. For Verlaine's reception in the *Saturday Review* prior to Harris's takeover was distinctly hostile. The digitization of

Victorian periodicals allows a rapid survey here, yielding eighteen allusions to Verlaine in the pages of the *Saturday Review* between January 1885 and July 1894.[33] Although the first of these merely describes his contribution to *La Revue indépendante* as "interesting" it is, in many respects, representative.[34] The majority of references to Verlaine before November 1894 were made in passing and frequently carried some form of disparaging implication; at no point before Symons's article was any of Verlaine's poetic output reviewed or discussed in an article or review that coincided with its first publication.

The next mention of his work, four years later in 1889, associates Verlaine with a combination of Mallarmé, Anatole France and Paul Bourget as an unfortunate influence on Jean Thorel.[35] Both of these allusions are contained within composite survey articles reviewing several books at a time under the general heading of "French Literature." This is also true of an unelaborated reference to Verlaine's "sculduggery" from August 1890.[36] Such passing references tend to take Verlaine's identity and status for granted, as if expecting readers to be aware of his works and their implications from another context. They may even imply a certain virtue from such an apparent refusal or abstention from explanation – as if further clarification about the details of Verlaine's skullduggery were beneath a respectable publication.

This effect is more obvious within a review of George Moore's collection of essays, *Impressions and Opinions* in April 1891:

> Is not the name of the neglected, the unutterable Verlaine something wherewith to conjure, good as that of Ibsen for the strife of factions? These be problems that may well arouse apprehension.

In context, the reviewer here draws mocking attention to Moore's claim to be the first critic to introduce Verlaine's work to English audiences.[37] Prior to Moore's intervention, the French poet's work had been "unutterable" in a more literal sense during the 1870s and 1880s. Although this period saw the publication of major works, such as *Romances sans paroles* (1874) and *Sagesse* (1880), Philip Stephan describes an "editorial boycott" in France regarding Verlaine and his work, as a consequence of the violent break-up of

his marriage, Verlaine's involvement with the Paris Commune and his notorious homosexual relationship with Arthur Rimbaud.[38] The general absence of coverage in the British press and the strong implication of a euphemistic reticence regarding his "sculduggery" during the same period indicates that nineteenth-century social and sexual taboos prevailed on both sides of the Channel.

As such, this description of "the neglected, unutterable Verlaine" engages in a complicated act of ventriloquism. It both echoes Moore's lament for the neglect of Verlaine by English readers and critics and it mimics the language of conservative critics and readers who view Verlaine as "unutterable." This is also confirmed by the nature of the passing references discussed above. At the same time, the reviewer also conveys an implicit criticism of Moore's pride in Verlaine's "unutterable" status. Verlaine, it is implied, has the same cachet for Moore as that held by Ibsen within fashionable literary circles as a figure of the daring or socially transgressive writer.

The most significant account of Verlaine's work in the *Saturday Review* before Harris's takeover is a lengthy retrospective analysis of his career from December 1891 in the wake of Moore's work. This confirms the paper's previous reticence or neglect of the French poet, by identifying its own occasion as Verlaine's recent popularity amongst English readers:

> The young ladies who were wont to twitter about Dr Ibsen now babble about M. Paul Verlaine. For some reason M. Verlaine is "in," like football, and tip-cat, and other games which appear and disappear in their due mysterious time.[39]

Prior to Harris's takeover of the *Saturday Review*, contributions were unsigned, so this writer remains unknown. The repetition here of disparaging reference to the fashionable status of Verlaine in certain circles and the comparison with Ibsen may, however, indicate that the same person who reviewed Moore's essays wrote this piece.[40]

Such sniping confirms Harris's concerns about the paper's general reputation for harsh reviewing as "The Saturday Reviler."[41] The tone is one of general disdain and sneering

skepticism and the piece concludes that *Fêtes galantes* contains "nothing especially worthy of quotation":

> We are at a loss to understand whence comes his present vogue among the refined. It is not that he is a bad poet; but France has assuredly many more as good of whom we hear little enough in the conversations of Culture.[42]

Although the reviewer does quote from Verlaine, the focus is very much upon his reception and the current "vogue" (the word is used twice) for his poetry. Verlaine's work, then, becomes the medium for an attack upon the English literary avant-garde ("the refined") and, implicitly, the methods associated with the New Journalism of the 1880s and 90s, since the fact that Verlaine has allowed himself to be "interviewed" is the most damning criticism offered.

Verlaine's treatment in the *Saturday Review* is symptomatic of the general conservatism that characterized its literary ethos in the years prior to takeover by Harris. In comparison, Edward Delille's profile of Verlaine, which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* during March 1891, is adulatory. Delille begins by identifying Verlaine's "peculiar thrill of grief" and "a new shade of woe" as the poet's "keynote" then instead struggles woefully with valedictory adjectives and similes to describe his work: Verlaine's poems present states of the soul that Delille compares to delicate miniature antelopes at the zoological gardens in the Jardins des Plantes at Paris.[43] If this opening sounds a little purple, the rest of the article seems nervous about Verlaine's status as a poet of Decadence and the reputation for a louche, alcoholic lifestyle that informs the innuendos found in the *Saturday Review*. This article does the deploy the language of disease that Symons would seek to transvalue through "The Decadent Movement in Literature," but Delille carefully reserves it until the final sections, where Verlaine is described as "the exquisite, delightful, diseased, lacerated poet of a morbid *élite*."[44] Delille plays down Verlaine's homosexuality, referring to it only by the briefest of double entendres and concentrates upon his relations with lower class women and prostitutes. Where the *Saturday Review* alluded to Verlaine's "sculduggery," Delille's response to the French poet's lifestyle is to generalize rather lamely that "extremes of bad in natures of a certain exquisite type […] lie […] close beside extremes of good."[45]

"Essential moral loveliness," he urges, may cohabit with "the most lamentable ignominy of circumstance."[46] Looking beyond Verlaine's personal circumstances, Delille connects his situation to the uncertain social and political life in France after the siege of Paris and the 1871 Commune, whilst omitting reference to Verlaine's direct involvement with the insurrection.[47] With reference to *Fêtes galantes*, Delille argues Verlaine's "morbid attraction" to "depravity" is redeemed by the thrill associated with his distaste for it, which looks forward, Delille implies, to Verlaine's subsequent turn to Catholicism as a reaction.

Although Delille's efforts seem contorted in his attempts to justify Verlaine's conduct, this only heightens the contrast with Verlaine's reception in the *Saturday Review.* Since it had appeared eight months previously, Delille's article may form part of the occasion for the disdainful profile of Verlaine in the *Saturday Review*, bearing witness to the enthusiasm which the latter finds so mystifying. One irony here is that the pages of the *Saturday Review* themselves provide direct evidence of the contemporary "vogue" for Verlaine lamented by its contributors: between 1880 and 1890, a digital search yields only four references to his name; whereas in 1892 there were seven allusions to Verlaine within the *Saturday Review*.

Where Delille praises Verlaine's technical accomplishments, emphasizing his break with the conventions of the classical alexandrine, another contributor in the *Saturday Review* singled out Verlaine's prosody for explicit attack in early 1893. This review, entitled, "Two Biographies," compares J. Pringle Nichol's life of Victor Hugo (in the Dilettante Library series) with Francis Espinasse's biography of Voltaire. As such, it turns upon the distinction between literary generations and the notion of succession. First, the piece compares books on two writers from different centuries; then it contrasts Nichol with Espinasse by remarking that "the whole tenor of [Nichol's] book smacks of literary youth"; and finally it quotes Nichol's account of Hugo's involvement with the Parnassian movement and his influence upon his successors in France: "the real leaders of the actual generation of French poets are Paul Verlaine […] and Stéphane Mallarmé." The remainder of this quotation is lengthy and includes the fourth stanza of "Art poétique" and its English translation.[48] Criticizing the rhythm of Verlaine's poem in detail, the reviewer allows him the right to experiment with "hypocatalectic verse," but describes

the third line of the verse quoted ("Oh! La nuance seule fiance") as "a rather childish and ugly jingle" and dismisses the whole verse as "rather bad."[49] The review concludes by explicitly linking Nichol's taste for such "childish" poetry to his relative youth and inexperience and to his links with a more recent literary generation ("he gropes in the actual and the ephemeral").[50]

The contrast between this hostile treatment of Verlaine in the *Saturday Review* and Delille's adulatory piece for the *Fortnightly* leads to two key observations: firstly, it indicates that Verlaine and his work continued to function into the1890s as a marker of a literary "modernity" to be resisted by the old guard of *Saturday Review* contributors, despite the fact that his work had begun to appear in France a generation before ("Art Poétique" was first published in 1874). Secondly, Delille's article was commissioned by Harris whilst he edited the *Fortnightly,* prior to his dismissal and subsequent purchase of the *Saturday Review*. If, as I shall argue, Symons's article reverses the conservative hostile treatment of Verlaine in the *Saturday*, then it seems likely that this may in part be attributed to the editorial influence of Harris.

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The treatment of Verlaine in the *Fortnightly Review* and *Saturday Review* prior to 1894 provides an important context for understanding the implications and impact of Symons's review of *Epigrammes* in November 1894 for Harris. In some respects, it may seem unlikely that this article could be of consequence. *Epigrammes* is a slight collection in which Verlaine looks back upon his own career as he senses his own mortality. Symons attempts to give the collection some gravitas by comparing it with Goethe's *West-östlicher Diwan*; whilst his review is reverential, Symons's praise is qualified in its general assessment of Verlaine's more recent writings, describing the *Epigrammes* as "delicately wrought little poems, more carefully written, for the most part, than much of his later verse."[51]

Nevertheless, this review reverses or redeems the generally hostile reception accorded to Verlaine previously within the *Saturday Review* in two ways. Firstly, as Symons's title ("Verlaine's New Poems") indicates, it is topical. Although *Epigrammes* is a late

collection, Symons's review is the first account of one of Verlaine's works to appear in the *Saturday Review* at the time the work was published. Symons responds to a recently published volume of poems rather than providing a retrospect, as if the readers of the *Saturday Review* ought to be kept up to date with Verlaine's career through a direct account of the volume instead of a summary or passing reference within a round-up or survey of recent publications in French. Indeed, Symons's review of Verlaine is pointedly published separately from a composite review by another contributor of Gustave Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française* and a volume of the *Mémoires* of Étienne-Denis Pasquier, which appeared four pages later under the collective title of "French Literature."

This spatial positioning within the periodical is the second manner in which the *Saturday Review* confers greater prominence upon what might otherwise seem a slender piece. Symons's review occupies three-quarters of one column in the literary reviews section of the paper. Although this is not more substantial than other articles in this section (a review of Charles Whibley's edition of *Tristram Shandy* occupies two columns, for example), the account of Verlaine is visually striking because it includes three separate quotations from the poems that are laid out and presented in their original mise-en-page. It is, in fact, the only review to cover poetry within that issue. Symons's coverage may not be lengthy or substantial in its content but its presentation acts as a physical and visual gesture of commitment and recognition towards Verlaine that accords with the general shift in literary ethos Harris was attempting to institute in his takeover of the *Saturday Review*.

Forming a point of continuity between Harris's role as editor of the *Fortnightly* and his tenure at the *Saturday Review*, Symons's positive response to Verlaine may be taken as indicative of the "progressive" cultural sympathies that Harris brought with him as an editor. This seemingly minor and anonymous contribution by Symons is engaged in undoing the hostile treatment Verlaine received within the conservative values of the *Saturday Review* under its previous management as part of the broader changes Harris was engaged in instituting. It reflects both Symons's interests and values as a critic, and those of Harris.

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It is notable that these changes in ethos register in subtle details of mise-en-page rather than explicit commentary. In this sense, they are characteristic of Harris's understated general approach to his takeover of the *Saturday Review.* The absence of Symons's signature from his first contributions is a case in point. In his previous role as editor of the *Fortnightly,* Harris had inherited its famous policy of including the names of contributors with articles. One easy way to signal the changes he made to the *Saturday Review* and draw attention to the avant-garde interests of his new journalistic team would have been to employ a similar policy of signature there. The "strictly anonymous" status of previous contributors, as described by H.G. Wells, reflects the paper's conservative adherence to tradition.[52] But, whilst Harris did introduce a policy of signing articles to the *Saturday Review*, the implementation of this was not immediate or universal.

In Symons's case, none of his eleven contributions during November and December 1894 bore his signature and only one of the ten items he contributed to the *Saturday Review* in 1895 was signed – an obituary description of a visit to Dumas. In 1896, however, although Symons published only seven contributions to the *Saturday Review,* nearly half of them were signed and in the next year, 1897, seven of the eight articles he contributed were signed. By 1898, only two of the twenty-one pieces that he contributed, lacked his signature, although one item, a slightly whimsical account of attitudes towards "fashion" over the centuries, appeared under his initials rather than his full signature.

Symons's experiences in this respect are broadly representative of Harris's editorial approach and his decision to implement signature only gradually. No item appeared under signature on 10 November 1894 when he took over the *Saturday Review.* When George Bernard Shaw began his role as theatre reviewer on 5 January 1895, his contributions were the only signed items in the issue, appearing above his initials. Harris broke the paper's tradition of anonymity at that point, presumably in order to draw attention to his new celebrity reviewer. By January 1898, leading articles in the opening pages of the *Saturday Review* maintained editorial anonymity and the financial

columns remained unsigned, but it now routinely included a number of signed articles, such as Spenser Wilkinson's series of articles on the costs and efficiency of the British Army and H.A. Bryden's impressionistic piece "A Morning with Foot Harriers."[53] Shaw still signed his theatre reviews using initials, but he had been joined by John F. Runcimann and Dugald Sutherland MacColl as Art critic and Music critic respectively; and they also signed their contributions with initials rather than their full names. In this way, Harris gradually began to nudge readers towards recognising the change in cultural affiliations that had taken place within the paper.

Nevertheless, the majority of the book reviews in the paper's final pages remained unsigned. This is where Symons's involvement begins to stand out. Initially his signature only appeared under items with some clear personal interest or connection. His response to the death of Alexandre Dumas fils in November 1895, for example, is cast as Symons's recollection of a recent visit to Dumas; it explicitly depends upon the "impression" this left upon Symons, implicitly linking this personal connection to his broader literary judgment upon Dumas: "he left upon us a certain impression, an impression of largeness, almost of greatness."[54] But Symons's contributions otherwise shared in the general anonymity that prevailed in the literary reviewing section of the paper, at least during the first years of his association with it. By 1898, Symons's literary reviews also appeared under his signature. In some cases, such as his review of Georgina Harding's translation of D'Annunzio's *The Triumph of Death* on 29 January 1898, Symons's was the only review in the literary section of that issue to be signed and it was conspicuously placed at the start of that section. Not only did the frequency with which Symons's contributions appeared under signature increase, then, but their positioning within the *Saturday Review* relative to other anonymous contributions conferred greater prominence upon him within its pages.

Even contributions by Symons that may seem to contradict this pattern are telling. The only two unsigned contributions to the *Saturday Review* he published in 1898 were literary reviews and it is possible that this was a deliberate choice motivated by tact or by personal considerations. Symons may have chosen not to sign his review of Stephen Phillips' poetry because he did not wish to own up too directly or publicly to the reservations expressed in that piece, which concludes that the volume leaves the reader

"admiring and unsatisfied, respectful and a little indifferent."[55] Similarly, the appearance of Symons's review of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* without his signature may reflect a certain discretion about the growing friendship between the two writers or it may reflect a contrary desire to keep the authorship of a qualified, although positive review ("Mr Joseph Conrad is visibly improving") secret from a recent literary contact.[56] Given the general prevalence of signed work by Symons at this time, it seems likely, then, that the omission of his signature from both of these articles was a matter of choice.

In general, however, these unsigned pieces run counter to the tendency from 1898 onwards whereby Symons's contributions to the *Saturday Review* enjoyed relative prominence both through the use of signature and their positioning within the periodical. The correlation between Symons's prominence in the *Saturday Review* and his broader reputation is not simple. Having been active in London's journalistic scene since the late 1880s, Symons joined Harris's team of contributors in 1894 at a point when he was starting to acquire a certain notoriety. The publication of "Stella Maris" within the *Yellow Book* earlier that year played a role here, as did his second collection of poetry, *London Nights* which appeared in 1895. Symons was incensed by the hostile critical reception this provoked and considered legal action against a reviewer who described him as "a dirty-minded man" in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.[57] But he also recognized the publicity value that came with the stir this caused.

His increasing public reputation during this period was confirmed by Symons's appointment as editor of the *Savoy* during 1896. The time and effort required by commitment probably explains why his contributions to the *Saturday Review* decreased during that year. As the *Savoy* failed, Symons wrote increasing amounts of the textual content, until the final issue of December 1896 consisted exclusively of items written by him. Even in its failure, then, the *Savoy* brought Symons exposure.

His involvement with the *Saturday Review* and positioning within its pages both reflects and derives from this broader exposure. Familiar with Symons from his previous contributions to the *Fortnightly Review*, Harris no doubt brought him onto his team as someone with whom he shared critical values. Whilst this is likely to have consolidated

Symons's public status, the increasing visibility conferred upon Symons during this period suggests that Harris also sought to capitalize upon Symons's reputation for the benefit of his own publication.

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Symons wrote 53 items for the *Saturday Review* during the period of Harris's editorship between 1894 and 1898 and continued as a contributor after his departure, providing a further 124 items from 1899 until the mental breakdown which brought his career to a temporary halt in 1908 (Figure 1.). Evidence from Symons's earliest contributions and the prominence his signature came to enjoy within the journal indicate that his relationship with the *Saturday Review* was mutually beneficial. Alongside articles by Shaw, Wells and others, Symons's writings on recent work by Verlaine and other European authors helped to confirm the new direction established by Harris for the paper in turning away from its conservative reputation in the arts. In return, the *Saturday Review* seems to have bolstered Symons's own reputation in the prominence it granted to his contributions – a ploy that served the paper's own reputation too.

Symons's involvement with the *Saturday Review* was to have a long-term significance that may have overshadowed the immediate impact of this collaboration. Having found a journalistic outlet for his critical writings on recent French literature, Symons went on to collect many of these essays in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which proved highly influential upon the first generation of Modernist writers, including Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, at the start of the twentieth century. Symons assembled this volume from a variety of sources, including articles and reviews published in the *Fortnightly Review,* the *Contemporary Review*, and the *Athenaeum*. Amongst this material, however, the largest proportion derived from contributions to the *Saturday Review*, forming the basis of half of the essays in the collection. Notably, all of the material from the *Saturday Review* which Symons re-published in *The Symbolist Movement* derives from the period of Harris's editorship.

Describing the origins of similar, earlier essay collections by Arnold, Wilde and Pater in periodical articles and reviews, Laurel Brake observes that the superficial coherence

and seeming "permanence of the book" can obscure the "ephemeral characteristics" associated with the origin of its contents in periodical form.[58] Symons's example proves the general truth of this observation. For the publication of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* has largely obscured the periodical origins of its contents and, in the process, obscured an important moment in the history of British responses to Decadent, Symbolist and avant-garde literature at the end of the nineteenth century. Symons was already writing on these kinds of topic before 1894 and, if Harris had not provided one, would no doubt have found some other journalistic outlet. But the fact is that the coincidence of their interests and Harris's ethos as an editor, saw Symons's writings appear during this period alongside those of Wells and Shaw, as well as figures such as D.S. MacColl, the Wagnerite music critic, John Runciman and the scientist Peter Chalmers Mitchell.

The "ephemeral" details obscured by subsequent literary history include, then, the role of editors and publishers in forming the corporate or collective identity of a periodical publication. Whilst his intervention transformed the values of the *Saturday Review*, this cannot simply be attributed to Harris. His policy of signature, for example, was inherited from his previous experiences at the *Fortnightly Review* where, as Sarah Nash confirms, signed articles were integral long before Harris became involved; that publication also had a long-standing reputation for its receptivity towards aestheticism and transgressive literary writers, as Stefano Evangelista's account of John Morley's preparedness to publish A.C. Swinburne's critical writings on Charles Baudelaire and French literature a generation previously shows.[59] The policies and proclivities as an editor that Harris brought to the *Saturday Review* were not independent initiatives: whilst they reflect his own tastes as an editor, they also stem from broader developments and his inheritance from previous generations of writers and editors.

The conjunction of Symons with Harris and the *Saturday Review* provides a telling example of such complex interactions, but it has broader ramifications too. If we are to expand our understanding of the resonance of Decadence and Symbolism within the fin de siècle British professional literary culture identified by Kirsten MacLeod, we need to look beyond familiar publications, such as the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy*. Symons's work, for example, appeared in the *Athenaeum, Academy, Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Star*,

amongst other places. His involvement with the *Saturday Review* provides just one focus for our understanding of the multiple and complex relationships between individual personalities, collective enterprises and wider social forces in the shaping of public discourse on the avant-garde.

Notes

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[1] Anon. "Chronicle," 13 October 1894, 396. For a full account of these events, including detailed description of Chant's testimony, see Donohue, *Fantasies of Empire*.
[2] Anon. "Chronicle," 20 October 1894, 423.
[3] Anon. "Pharisaism and Music-Halls," 405.
[4] Symons, "The Case of Empire," 502.
[5] MacLeod, *Fictions*, 5.
[6] Symons, "Decadent Movement," p. 558.
[7] Bevington devotes less than two pages to Harris's ownership of the *Saturday Review* between 1894 and 1898, in *The Saturday Review,* 324-35; this period receives similarly scant treatment in Powell, "The Saturday Review," 381/2; and, Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters,* 96-7.
[8] MacLeod, *Fictions*, 16.
[9] MacLeod, *Fictions*, 14.
[10] Bevington, *The Saturday Review,* 21.
[11] Harris, *My Life and Loves*, 702.
[12] Anon. "Mr Swinburne's New Poems," 145; 147.
[13] Harris, *My Life and Loves*, 704.
[14] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, 438. For a fuller account of Wells's involvement, see Philmus, "H.G. Wells as Literary Critic."
[15] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, 438.
[16] Quoted in Weintraub, *The Playwright and the Pirate,* 121.
[17] Harris, *My Life and Loves*, 704-5.
[18] Wells, "Fiction," 797.
[19] McDonald, *British Literary Culture,* 22-27.
[20] Weintraub, *The Playwright and the Pirate*, 122.
[21] Harris, *My Life and Loves*, 703.
[22] Flint, "The Philistine and the New," 211-15.
[23] Beckson, *A Life,* 73-75.
[24] Harris, *Contemporary Portraits*, 74.
[25] Symons, "A Spanish Music Hall," 716.
[26] Cevasco, *Breviary,* 40-66. Moore's review appeared anonymously in *St. James's Gazette* during September 1884.
[27] Symons, "J.K. Huysmans," 402-14.

[28] Ibid., 412. Examples of the ubiquity surrounding Symons's "breviary" comparison include, amongst others, MacLeod, *Fictions*, 3; Pittock, *Spectrum,* 71; Sheehan, *Modernism*, 33; and Sherry, *Modernism*, 9.
[29] Whibley, "Reviews and Magazines," 181. For an account of Henley's domineering "purist" literary politics and "Common sense" cultural conservatism, see McDonald, *British Literary Culture*, 32-47.
[30] Symons, "Mr. Henley's Poetry," 183-84.
[31] For an account of Symons's article on Henley and "The Art of Modernity," see Gibbons, *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel*, 67-97, esp. 72-74.
[32] Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 67/8.
[33] The statistics for Figure 1 and all digital searches of the Victorian periodicals were conducted through Proquest's "British Periodicals" site: search.proquest.com, using institutional access provided by the University of Glasgow.
[34] Anon. "French Literature," 18 May 1889, 620.
[35] Anon. "French Literature," 3 January 1885, 31-32.
[36] Anon. "French Literature," 9 August 1890, 181.
[37] Anon. "Mr. George Moore's 'Impressions and Opinions'," 484.
[38] Stephan, *Paul Verlaine*, p. 62.
[39] Anon. "M. Paul Verlaine," 645.
[40] As a regular reviewer of French literature with relatively conservative tastes, George Saintsbury, mentioned by H.G. Wells amongst the outgoing staff of the *Saturday Review*, is one possibility here.
[41] Harris, *My Life and Loves*, 704.
[42] Anon. "M. Paul Verlaine," 646.
[43] Delille, "The Poet Verlaine," 394.
[44] Ibid., 405.
[45] Ibid., 397.
[46] Ibid., 398.
[47] Ibid., 399/400.
[48] Anon. "Two Biographies,"184.
[49] Ibid., 185.
[50] Ibid., 185.
[51] Symons, "Verlaine's New Poems," 511.
[52] Regarding signature and the controversies it caused, see Nash, "A Name,"57-82.
[53] These representative examples are taken from the *Saturday Review* of 29 January 1898.
[54] Symons, "A Visit to Dumas Fils," 724-25.
[55] Symons, "Mr Stephen Phillips' Poems," 22.
[56] Symons, "Mr Conrad's Latest Story," 211.
[57] See Beckson, *A Life,* 118-20.
[58] Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 66.
[59] Evangelista, "Swinburne's French Voice" 15-32.

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